

NUTRITION

How can people with diabetes use the food label to help with their diets?

How beneficial the new label will be for people with diabetes depends on the type of meal plan they follow. Today, diabetes experts no longer recommend a single diet for all people with diabetes. Instead, they advocate dietary regimes that are flexible and take into account a person's lifestyle and particular health needs.

The American Diabetes Association recommends these general dietary guidelines for people with diabetes:

- Limit fat to 30 percent or less of daily calories.
- Limit saturated fat to 10 percent or less of daily calories.
- Limit protein to 10 to 20 percent of daily calories. For those with initial signs of diabetes-induced kidney disease, restrict protein to 10 percent of daily calories.
- Limit cholesterol to 300 milligrams or less daily.
- Consume about 20 to 35 grams of fiber daily.

Most of these guidelines are a good idea for the general population, as well. Considering these factors, how should people with diabetes go about using the new food label? They can begin with the Nutrition Facts panel, usually on the side or back of the package. A column headed Percent Daily Values shows whether a food is high or low in many of the nutrients listed. People with diabetes should check the Percent Daily Values for fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.

As a rule of thumb, if the number is 5 or less, the food may be considered low in that nutrient. The goal for most people with diabetes is to pick foods that have low Percent Daily Values for fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol and high Percent Daily Values for fiber. Other label nutrition information can help people with diabetes see if and how a food fits into their meal plan. The serving size information gives the amount of food to which all other numbers on the Nutrition Facts panel apply.

Serving sizes now are more uniform among similar products and reflect the amounts people actually eat. For example, the reference amount for a serving of snack crackers is 30g. Thus, the serving size for soda crackers is 10 crackers and for Goldfish Tiny Crackers, 55, because these are the amounts that come closest to 30 g. The similarity in serving sizes makes it easier to compare the nutritional qualities of related foods.

People who use the Exchange Lists should be aware that the serving size on the label may not be the same as that in the Exchange Lists. For example, the label serving size for orange juice is 8 fluid ounces (240 milliliters). In the exchange lists, the serving size is 4 ounces (one-half cup) or 120 mL. So, a person who drinks one cup of orange juice has used two fruit exchanges.

Please visit <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qa-top.html> to learn more about how to use the Nutrition Fact Panel.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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